

**DOCTRINAL ESSAY DELIVERED AT THE 56<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION**

by

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## *The Active Obedience of Christ — His Righteousness for Our Justification*

*“By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”*

—Romans 5:18b

When thinking about what Christ did to save us from our sins, the thought that most commonly first comes to mind is the great pain and agony that He endured for us, beginning with His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and ending with His death on the cross. It is not difficult to understand why this crucial part of His redemptive work (which we refer to as the *passive obedience* of Christ) is most commonly emphasized. After all, it evokes deep feelings of sympathetic grief and sorrow on account of our sins, which drove Him to that suffering, as well as feelings of reciprocative love, gratitude, and joy; for by His *passive obedience*, Jesus took the wages of our sins (Romans 6:23) upon Himself—suffering the unimaginable pains of hell on the cross in our place, and thus saving us from eternal damnation. Christ’s suffering and death were absolutely necessary for the appeasing of God’s wrath against us and the securing of forgiveness for lost mankind, for the Bible says: *“Without shedding of blood is no remission”* (Hebrews 9:22). But this *passive obedience*—if considered all by itself—would still have left us in a state in which we would be lacking true righteousness before God (even though the penalty for our disobedience would have been removed). Being truly *righteous* in the eyes of the Lord includes more than just preventing one’s heart, mind, mouth, and hand from doing what God forbids (despite what the monks imagine who isolate themselves from the world in silent seclusion). Rather, true righteousness also includes the constant performance of all that God’s Law requires of us concerning our duties toward Him and our neighbor in all of our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. J. H. Thayer defines the Greek word for *“righteous”* [δικαιος] as “upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God.” Therefore, being counted truly *righteous* before the Lord requires more than having the punishment that we deserve by our sins transferred to another.

Indeed, in addition to the *passive obedience* of Christ, the Gospel tells us about another important aspect of His work of redemption, which was necessary in order for us to be *“justified”* (regarded as and declared to be righteous), and to be received into the eternal mansions of heaven by His grace (Matthew 25:46). And this other crucial part, which is sadly often minimized or overlooked completely in outward Christendom, is His perfect keeping of God’s Law in behalf of all mankind. This is what we refer to as His *active obedience*. The very fact that Christ’s *active obedience* is so often eclipsed by His *passive obedience* in the minds of Christians supplies us with a very good reason to focus special attention upon this glorious doctrine of the Gospel. In the present essay we will be examining this important part of our Savior’s work under the following five parts: **Part I:** *The “Active Obedience” of Christ Defined*; **Part II:** *The Necessity of Christ’s Active Obedience*; **Part III:** *References to the Active Obedience of Christ in the Old and New Testaments*; **Part IV:** *The Comfort that Christ’s Active Obedience Gives Us*; and **Part V:** *The Active Obedience of Christ Applied in Our Lives of Sanctification*. Now may God the Holy Ghost richly bless us in and through this study of His Word!

### **Part I: The “Active Obedience” of Christ DEFINED**

The term *“active obedience,”* like the term *“passive obedience,”* is not found anywhere in the Bible—though the single word *“obedience”* is used in Romans 5:19 with reference to Christ’s *active obedience*; and the word *“obedient”* is used in Philippians 2:8 with reference to His

*passive obedience*. Such terms as *active* and *passive obedience* are ecclesiastical terms (that is, “church terms”)—much like the words “*Trinity*” and “*Sacrament*,” which also are not found in the Bible but are used to great profit in the Christian Church for the purpose of labeling and describing important doctrines that *are* clearly set forth in the Scriptures. Simply defined, the *active obedience* of Jesus Christ refers to that part of His redemptive work by which He perfectly fulfilled all of God’s Commandments for us—living a life of complete holiness in all of His thoughts and desires, words and deeds. As was mentioned in the introduction to this essay, the other important part of Christ’s work of atonement is what we call His *passive obedience*, in which He suffered under the weight of the world’s sins that punishment which we all deserve, namely, the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13), being completely forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46) in the torments of hell (Matthew 25:41, 46).

Even though it seems to be quite common for people to claim to be confused by these two terms—neither knowing nor understanding the definitions of “*active obedience*” and “*passive obedience*” — they really should not be difficult to keep straight as long as it is remembered what it means for a person to be *active* in doing something (in grammar, the verb being performed *by* the subject), as opposed to the person being *passive* while things are done to him (in grammar, the verb being performed *upon* the subject). So in Christ’s *active obedience* He was *actively* engaged in the continuous and flawless keeping of God’s holy Law, while in His *passive obedience* He was *passively* suffering the sorrows and agony inflicted upon Him by the mockery of His enemies, the scourge, the cross, and especially the righteous wrath of the Lord God provoked and justly deserved by sinful mankind because of their transgressions.

Under the Second Article in our *Catechism* (C. P. H., 1943), we find the following passage (number 318) quoted from Romans 5:19: “*By the **obedience** of One shall many be made righteous.*” But how can we know exactly to what this individual word, “*obedience*,” is referring (since it is not modified by either of the adjectives, “*active*” or “*passive*”)? Now our *Catechism* correctly cites this passage in connection with Christ’s *active obedience* and *NOT* His *passive obedience*. But how do we know that the *Catechism* is right in doing so? (After all, the passage just says “*obedience*.”) Of course, the proper thing to do whenever such questions arise is to look up the verse in the Bible and to read it in context. If this is done with the verse in question, it becomes readily apparent that the word “*obedience*” in Romans 5:19 refers specifically to the *active obedience* of Christ and *NOT* His *passive obedience*, since the entire verse reads: “*For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.*” Notice that the word “*obedience*” is directly contrasted with the word “*disobedience*.” The clause “*by one man’s **disobedience** many were made sinners*” is a clear reference to Adam’s violation of God’s prohibition concerning man’s eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This one act of disobedience brought sin and its consequences upon the whole multitude of all mankind. In contrast to this *disobedience*, or violation of God’s Law, another Man’s *obedience*, or perfect fulfilling of His Law, is here presented as that which brings the declaration of righteousness upon all people. Additionally, the word “*obedience*” in this verse is a direct parallel to the word “*righteousness*” in the verse that comes just before it. So then taking verses 18 and 19 together, we are told: “*Therefore as, by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so, by the righteousness of One, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.*” Without a doubt, these verses are clearly and directly speaking about the *active obedience* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A brief note about the word “many” in Romans 5:19: The word combination that is here translated in our King James Version as “many” with reference to “*be[ing] made righteous*” can be somewhat misleading. Those who are Calvinistic Reformed would prefer this translation since it seems to support their false teaching of a limited atonement, namely, that Christ’s work of redemption purchased forgiveness only for the elect. However, in the original Greek, it does not simply say “πολλοί...,” which would mean “many;” but it says “ο Ἐπολλοί...,”—literally “*the many*”—that is, the entire corrupt mass of all mankind. This is one of the rare instances where the NIV gives a more correct rendering of the original, stating “*the many*” instead of just “many.” But it should also be noted that even using the King James Version, and even without any knowledge of the original Greek, the all-inclusive connotation of the word “many,” as it appears in this passage, can still be deduced from two important contextual clues. In the first place, the same “many” is used in the first part of the verse with reference to those who were made sinners through Adam’s disobedience; and we know from numerous other passages that the sin of Adam was passed on to *all* of his descendants (Romans 5:12,18; Ephesians 2:3), not just *many* or *most* of them (the only exception being Christ). Secondly, we see that in the verse that comes just before it (verse 18), the same basic doctrines of Adam’s sin leading to universal guilt and Jesus’ righteousness leading to universal (or objective) justification are also set forth, but this time using the word “all” instead of “many.”

In the *active obedience* of Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity placed Himself under His own Law and perfectly fulfilled it as our Substitute. But, in order for this to be accomplished, it was necessary for the Son of God to become a true human being. St. Paul writes to the Galatians: “*When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*” (4:4–5). Accordingly, the *active obedience* of Christ began from the very point of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. It could not have started prior to His conception, since He did not have a human nature before that time and, therefore, could not have been taking the place of man under the Law. But when did His *active obedience* come to an *end*? It continued without interruption all the way through His suffering and death on the cross. In other words, Jesus was still perfectly fulfilling the Law for us in His *active obedience* while He was suffering our punishment in His *passive obedience* (I Peter 2:21–23). But the *active obedience* of Christ could not have continued beyond His death since He declared from the cross shortly before He gave up the ghost that His work of redemption, wrought by both His *active and passive obedience*, was fully “*accomplished*” (the Greek of “*finished*” in John 19:30).

The entire life of Jesus in His *state of humiliation* was lived as our perfect Substitute under God’s Law to redeem us from our sins. Though *we* are *sinful* from our mother’s womb, as David wrote by inspiration of God: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psalm 51:5), yet *Christ* was conceived and born in *sinless perfection*. The original sin that infects us all did not infect the Lord Jesus. Now the Bible *does* say that He was sent “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3), which means that Jesus’ body (unlike Adam’s prior to the fall) was subject to such consequences of sin as pains and weaknesses. But it must be understood that Jesus Himself had no sinful flesh; His human nature was not under the corrupting influence of sin, as the angel Gabriel testified in his words to Mary, saying: “*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35).

The fact that the Son of Mary is also the *Son of God* is a crucial point to keep in mind when considering why the *active obedience* of Christ had **atoning value**. It has already been

mentioned why it was necessary for His *active obedience* that our Savior be a true *man*, namely, so that He could take our place under the Law of God. But why was it necessary for our Savior also to be true *God* in connection with His *active obedience*? The answer that might first come to mind is this: He needed to be *God* in order to be able to *fulfill the Law perfectly*. Man is sinful, but God is not. And while His divine holiness *does* have a direct bearing on His perfect keeping of the Law, if this were the *only* consideration, then God could have (hypothetically speaking) used His omnipotence to create in the Virgin Mary a perfect, purely human offspring who had been miraculously kept from any taint of original sin and completely immune to actual sins. But even if this purely hypothetical, sinless man had been brought forth by the almighty power of God, and even if he had been able to live his entire life in perfect accord with the moral Law of God, yet this man, if he were only a man and not also God, still would not be able to redeem fallen mankind. If he were sinless, then he himself would not be condemned; but that would not help the rest of us who would still be under the Lord's wrath on account of *our* innumerable trespasses and sins. No, for the *active obedience* of Christ to benefit *us*, our Savior needed to be more than just a perfect *man* —He also needed to be *true God* so that His substitutionary life under the Law would have the *infinite* value required to redeem the whole world. The Psalmist writes: “*None of them* [mere human beings] *can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious*” (Psalm 49:7–8).

Since Jesus is *God*, and one of God's attributes (all of which are unchangeable) is that He is *holy*, it was really impossible for Jesus to fail in His *active obedience*. In other words, there is no way that He could have sinned, since He is God; and it is impossible for God to sin. This fact, however, should not make us think that the temptations brought against Him by the devil were not real or serious temptations. For example, when Jesus was talking about His upcoming suffering and death, and the disciple Peter tried to convince Him to abandon His plans, Jesus turned to Peter and said: “*Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offense unto Me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*” (Matthew 16:21–23). Peter's words were a serious temptation from the devil, because Christ as a *true man* desired to avoid the intense pain and agony that He knew lay ahead of Him. Remember how He prayed so intensely in the Garden of Gethsemane that if it were possible, the cup of suffering might be taken away (Matthew 26:39, 42; Mark 14:35–36; Luke 22:42). But also remember that He did not for a second set His will against the will of His heavenly Father (which was *also His own will* to redeem fallen mankind). The natural human desire to avoid pain is not sinful in and of itself; it is, however, sinful if in seeking to avoid suffering we transgress the will of the Lord. (Peter's three-fold denial of the Lord in the courtyard of the high-priest is a clear example of how this can happen). Because Jesus was a true human being, the temptation to oppose the will of His heavenly Father and avoid suffering was a real temptation; but because Jesus was at the same time also the true and *holy* God, He did not even for a second entertain the thought of thwarting the divine will; and it was really *impossible* for Him to succumb to the temptation and fall into sin. The writer to the Hebrews testifies concerning Christ: “*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (4:15).

## Part II: The Necessity of Christ's Active Obedience

What God did in His Law demand  
and none to Him could render  
caused wrath and woe on ev'ry hand

for man, the vile offender.  
Our flesh has not those pure desires  
the spirit of the Law requires,  
and lost is our condition.

From sin our flesh could not abstain;  
sin held its sway unceasing.  
The task was useless and in vain;  
our guilt was e'er increasing.  
None can remove sin's poisoned dart  
or purify our guileful heart—  
so deep is our corruption.

(T.L.H. 377, v. 2, 4)

Let us now consider why it was necessary for our forgiveness and eternal salvation that Christ carry out this crucial part of our redemption known as His *active obedience*. The Lord our God has set forth strict, unbending demands and prohibitions in His holy Law—requiring *absolute perfection* of us in *everything* that we *do, say, think*, or even *feel* deep down in our heart. Now the fact that God demands that we be completely, one hundred percent, *perfect* without even a single sinful thought or emotion is denied by modern rationalists who follow such popular thinking as: “God knows that no one is perfect. He, therefore, wouldn’t require us to do what He knows is impossible. God only requires that we *try our best*”; and so on. But as “reasonable” as such statements might sound, they stand in blatant opposition to the clear declarations of the Lord in His Law. Because *He Himself is holy*, God also demands that *we be holy*. Clearly set forth in the pages of Scripture, His requirement for all people of all times is: “*Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy*” (Leviticus 19:2); and again: “*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48). If He made any exceptions, allowances, or excuses for sin—if He were tolerant or dismissive of even one of our sins—God would be neither perfectly holy nor perfectly just. And the fact that even only *one sin*, indeed, renders us *completely guilty* before God according to His Law is stated in the divinely inspired words recorded by the Apostle James as follows: “*Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (2:10).

So then in order *not* to fall under the verdict of “guilty,” a person would have to keep all of God’s Commandments *perfectly*—not just outwardly but also in the very thoughts and feelings of his heart and mind. And who among us is capable of doing *that* (Psalm 130:3-4)? Is there any human being in the entire history of humanity, with the exception of Christ Himself (Hebrews 7:26; I Peter 2:22), who has ever lived his entire life in sinless perfection? No, not one. In the third chapter of his epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul declares: “*We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. ...what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ...for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*” (vv. 9–12, 19, 22–23). And there is certainly an abundance of other Bible passages (such as are listed in our *Catechism* under Question 88 in the *Close of the Commandments*) that could also be cited to prove the universality of sin; but let these suffice.

The reason why every human being is completely incapable of living a life free from sin is what resulted from the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and has been passed on through all generations, namely, the total corruption of our human nature known as *original sin*. Now it should be clearly understood that original sin is not a mere spiritual impairment that can be overcome by a person's self-decision, willpower, or hard work, but is instead a condition of *spiritual blindness* (I Corinthians 2:14), *spiritual death* (Ephesians 2:1, 5), and *spiritual enmity against God* (Romans 8:7). Accordingly, man by nature is both *unable* and *unwilling* to turn away from sin and serve the Lord (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:11). This universal corruption affects every human being (Romans 3:12), with the one obvious exception of Christ. Yes, even Mary, the mother of Jesus, contrary to Romanist dogma, was indeed a sinner who also confessed her own unworthiness and need for a Savior, as the Evangelist Luke records in the first chapter of his Gospel (vv. 47–48). The product of this *original sin* is all manner of *actual sins*—violations of God's holy Law in our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds (Matthew 15:18–20). All of us are by nature totally corrupt and depraved before God. Therefore, since we are unable to fulfill the legislative demands of God's Law and live in righteousness and true holiness, Christ's *active obedience* was necessary for our redemption, to fill the void of unrighteousness caused by our *original sin*, as well as by our *actual sins* of commission and omission, and to render our account with God satisfactory to Him.

Now the holiness bodies (groups such as the Methodists, the Church of the Nazarene, certain Pentecostal groups, and others) argue on the basis of their false interpretation of I John 3:9 that, although all men *by nature* are sinful, yet once a person becomes a Christian, he no longer sins. Those who believe that they are capable of keeping God's Commandments for themselves see no importance in the active obedience of Jesus Christ and, therefore, despise this precious doctrine of the Gospel. But lest anyone think that, when the Bible describes the universality of sin in such clear terms as: "*There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not*" (Ecclesiastes 7:20), this is only a description of *unbelievers*, the Apostle John declares in his first epistle: "*If we [we who say that we are Christians] say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (1:8). Though it is true that, when we were brought to faith, the Holy Ghost created a new man in us that does not sin at all but, as the partial renewal of God's image, is "*created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:24), yet we still have the sinful flesh as well, which continuously corrupts all our works, so that even "*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6) when judged according to God's justice. It should certainly not be difficult for us Christians to see our sins if we honestly evaluate our lives in the clear mirror of God's holy Law (Romans 7:10ff). But sadly the holiness bodies, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, take only a very superficial view of the Law. It is, therefore, crucial that we always remember the fact that God requires perfection *even in all of our thoughts*; and, remembering this, we must all confess that we have broken every one of the Lord's Commandments. In His "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus emphasized the breaking of the Fifth and Sixth Commandments, saying: "*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire. ...Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*" (Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28).

Thus, recognizing from Jesus' own exposition of the Commandments that not only the coarsest outbursts of sin are violations of God's Law, we may also say that, concerning the *First*

*Commandment*, though we may never have physically bowed down to an idol of stone, yet we daily let worldly concerns and fleshly desires supplant the fear, love, and trust in the Lord that should always hold the highest place in our heart (Genesis 39:9; Matthew 22:37; Proverbs 3:5). Concerning the *Second Commandment*: Though we may be able to control our tongues to the extent that we do not exclaim the Lord God's name in vain when we see something shocking or amazing, yet we are so often guilty of taking His name in vain when we pray or sing praises to Him without even thinking about the words that we are addressing to the Lord; nor do we always use His name properly as we should—calling upon Him for help in every need, thanking Him for all the blessings that He so graciously and abundantly showers upon us, and speaking of Him to others (Psalm 50:15; 118:1; Acts 4:20). Concerning the *Third Commandment*: Though we may be consistent church-goers, yet how many of us have regular family devotions in our homes and set aside additional time for personal Bible study? And we must all plead guilty of not always gladly meditating upon the Word of God as thoroughly as we should; nor do we always share what we have learned from the Scriptures with others who could benefit from having the Law and Gospel properly applied to them (Luke 2:19; Matthew 6:33). Concerning the *Fourth Commandment*: Though we may never have cursed our parents or spit in their faces, yet resentment and rebellion against our parents and other authorities whom God has placed over us, such as our school teachers, employers, government officials, and pastors, are violations of God's *Fourth Commandment* (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; Romans 13:1-2; Luke 10:16). Concerning the *Fifth Commandment*: Though we may not have killed anyone or inflicted bodily injury upon another person, yet all unjustified anger and hurtful words directed against our neighbor tend to shorten and embitter his life and thus are sins against this Commandment (Matthew 5:22; Ephesians 4:31; James 3:10). Concerning the *Sixth Commandment*: Though we may have never committed adultery or engaged in extra-marital sexual relations, yet we must confess that all unchaste, unclean, lustful thoughts, desires, words and deeds are sin (Matthew 5:28; II Timothy 2:22); and husbands who have not loved their wives perfectly as Christ loved His Church, and wives who have not always submitted themselves to their husbands in honor and love as the Church is subject unto Christ, sin against the *Sixth Commandment* by omission (Ephesians 5:24-25). Concerning the *Seventh Commandment*: Though we may not have committed armed robbery, yet when we set our affections on money and worldly things so that we act in the service of mammon instead of in the service of the Lord, we violate not only His *Seventh Commandment* but also the *First Commandment* (Matthew 6:24). Concerning the *Eighth Commandment*: Though we may never have been guilty of perjury, that is, of lying under oath, yet the telling of untruths in order to deceive or harm our neighbor, the twisting of the truth in order to cover our sins, the damaging of our neighbor's reputation with slander, and the giving of our ear to gossip are violations of this Commandment (Proverbs 19:5; Psalm 50:16-22), as well as not defending our neighbor when he is maligned (Proverbs 31:8-9). Concerning the *Ninth and Tenth Commandments*: Though we may not have allowed covetous feelings to show themselves in outwardly pursuing illegitimate acquisition of that which belongs to our neighbor, yet, when any of us falls prey to a sinful desire for that which is his, that desire itself is sin (Romans 7:7; Hebrews 13:5). And certainly many more sins could have been added to this list—sins that we Christians commit daily due to the weakness of our flesh. Not a single one of us can honestly claim to have kept God's Commandments perfectly as He requires (Romans 3:19; I John 1:8, 10).

Now there are those that would say: "So what? What's the big deal? I sin; you sin; *everybody* sins. Why be so concerned about pointing out the fact that a person has broken God's Commandments?" The reason why this really *is* a very important matter (even for those who do not acknowledge it to be so) is because "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23)—both



*temporal death* and *eternal death*. The original sin in which we were conceived and born, even considered apart from the actual sins that it produces, still makes us worthy of God’s wrath and punishment, as we read in Ephesians chapter two: “[We Christians] *were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*” (v. 3). Even that which man would regard as the smallest and least significant violation of God’s Commandments makes the sinner worthy of the ultimate punishment of everlasting damnation in the fires of hell. We read in St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians, chapter three, verse ten: “*As many as are of the works of the Law* [that is, as many as try to save themselves through the keeping of the Law] *are under the curse* [damnation]; *for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them.*” Because it is completely impossible for sinful mankind to fulfill the Law of the Lord perfectly as He requires, the Scriptures state: “*No man is justified* [or, counted righteous] *by the Law in the sight of God*” (Galatians 3:11); and the Psalmist prays to the Lord, saying: “*Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified*” (143:2). And since, as the Scriptures clearly testify (Psalm 7:11; II Timothy 4:8), the Lord our God is a “*righteous Judge,*” He cannot simply overlook or excuse violations of His Law. To do so would be to deny His *holiness* and His *justice*; and that would be completely impossible since God is also *faithful* and *unchangeable*. The Scriptures assure us that the Lord “*abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself*” (II Timothy 2:13). Therefore, the Lord God must abide by what He has declared in His Law—*demanding perfection of us*. This is what may be referred to as God’s *legislative justice*; and this justice must be satisfied if we are to be received favorably before the just Judge of all mankind.

Since we are completely incapable of satisfying His legislative justice (the righteousness that His Law demands), the Lord, in His great mercy and grace, decreed in eternity, even before the world was made, to send His only-begotten Son into the world as a true man to take our place under His Law and as our Substitute to fulfill it perfectly (Galatians 4:4–5). And this is precisely what He accomplished for us in His *active obedience*.

### **Part III: References to the Active Obedience of Christ in the Old and New Testaments**

Yet as the Law must be fulfilled  
or we must die despairing,  
Christ came and hath God’s anger stilled,  
our human nature sharing.  
He hath for us the Law obeyed  
and thus the Father’s vengeance stayed  
which over us impended.

(T.L.H. 377, v. 5)

Long before the holy Son of God received His true human body and soul in the womb of the virgin Mary, the Lord had already taught His people in the Old Testament about the *active obedience* of Christ—both by symbols as well as by clear statements of prophecy. Though the various animal sacrifices commanded in the ceremonial laws more clearly foreshadowed the *passive obedience* of Christ, as bloody offerings for sin (Hebrews 9:22), there was also an important detail in these sacrifices that foreshadowed His *active obedience*. The animals used for the offerings (sheep, goats, or oxen) were to be *without blemish and spot*. “*Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves [oxen], of the sheep, or of the goats. But*

whatsoever hath a blemish, **that** shall ye **not** offer; for it shall **not** be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be **perfect** to be accepted; there shall be **no blemish** therein. Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen [a running sore], or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall **not** offer **these** unto the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the Lord. Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall **not** be accepted. Ye shall **not** offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut; neither shall ye make any offering thereof in your land” (Leviticus 22:19–24). It is clear from these verses that there was only one offering in which God permitted deformed animals to be offered, and that was for the kind of “*peace offering*” that was known as the “*freewill offering*.” Aside from that one exception, all animal offerings were to be without any blemish or disease; they were to be “*perfect*.” And not only were the animal sacrifices themselves to be free from blemish, but also the one performing the sacrifices (the priest) could not have any physical deformities (Leviticus 21:17–23). In addition to being *physically* free of blemishes and diseases, the priests also needed to be *spiritually* purified from their sins. For this reason the high-priest, on the Great Day of Atonement, needed to offer up a *separate* sacrifice first for his own sins (Leviticus 16:17, 24)—in order to be declared righteous for Christ’s sake—before the sacrifice for the people would be accepted. So also the requirement of physical perfection was clearly set forth in the case of the lambs that were used by the Jews in the Passover feast. The blood that was painted on the side and upper door posts for a token of safety against the tenth plague in Egypt (the death of the first-born) needed to be the blood of a lamb that was “*without blemish*” (Exodus 12:5).

All of these things were foreshadows of Christ’s *active obedience*. Now in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, He was both the *holy High Priest* and the *holy offering* for the sins of the world. The writer to the Hebrews refers to this fact in chapter seven, verses 26–27, where we read: “*Such an High Priest became us [was ‘fitting’ or ‘necessary’ for us], who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the people’s; for this He did once, when He offered up Himself.*” So we see that, in the New Testament, Jesus is clearly set forth as the direct fulfillment of this Old Testament symbolism. When John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to his disciples, he identified Him as “*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Remembering that the Old Testament required that the sacrificial and Passover lambs be *spotless*, we cannot limit this appellation as applying to Christ only on account of His *passive obedience* (His suffering and death); it clearly encompasses also His *active obedience* (His life of holiness). The Apostle Peter stresses this when he writes in his first epistle: “*Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation [way of life] received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a **lamb without blemish and without spot***” (1:18–19).

Additional Old Testament references to the fact that the Messiah would live a life of sinless perfection can be found in prophecies that give Him such titles as “*righteous Servant*” (Isaiah 53:11) and “*righteous Branch*” (Jeremiah 23:5). Of course, *TRUE righteousness* according to God’s Law is far different from the “*civic righteousness*” that even unbelievers are able to produce, which is merely an outward show of following the Law in external matters only. Therefore, in order for Jesus to be truly “*righteous*” before the Law of the Lord, His *heart* also needed to be completely holy—filled solely with perfect love for God and truly delighting to do all of His Commandments. And this is exactly the kind of righteousness that characterized our Savior Jesus Christ, as He says in prophecy in Psalm 40: “*Then said I, Lo, I come; in the*

*volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy Law is within My heart*" (vv. 7–8). The fact that this was the pre-incarnate Christ speaking through the Psalmist is clearly revealed by the Holy Ghost in the book of Hebrews, chapter ten, verses five through nine.

Jesus emphasized the fact that His *active obedience* was the work of fulfilling all the will and Law of God in our stead, as our Substitute, the work which His Father had given Him to do, as He told His disciples "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill*" (Matthew 5:17); and again: "*As the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do*" (John 14:31). And though the Jews from that time down to the present day falsely accuse Him of all manner of wickedness, when Jesus challenged His enemies, saying: "*Which of you convinceth [Gk. convicteth] Me of sin?*" (John 8:46), not a single sin could be attributed to Him. At Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, His enemies had to seek out men who were willing to perjure themselves in order to make it look as if Jesus had committed some sin (Mark 14:55); but God clearly exposed their lies for what they were (Mark 14:56, 59). In further refutation of that false testimony, the Holy Ghost has given us the real truth of the matter through the inspired testimony of various apostles. St. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians that Christ "*knew no sin*" (5:21). The writer to the Hebrews states that Jesus "*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*" (4:15). In his first epistle, Peter testifies that Jesus "*did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth*" (2:22). And the Apostle John writes in his first epistle that "*in Him [Christ] is no sin*" (1 John 3:5). It is also worthwhile noting that His perfect keeping of the Law can be observed in all of Christ's words and deeds, from childhood up, as these have been recorded for our learning and edification in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

#### **Part IV: The Comfort that Christ's Active Obedience Gives Us**

Let me not doubt, but trust in Thee;  
Thy Word cannot be broken.  
Thy call rings out, "Come unto Me!"  
No falsehood hast Thou spoken.  
Baptized into Thy precious name,  
my faith cannot be put to shame;  
and I shall never perish.

(*T.L.H.* 377, v. 7)

But how exactly does the fact that Christ kept the Law of God perfectly benefit *us* who have violated His Law countless times and are, therefore, worthy of the full extent of His wrath? As was mentioned briefly in the first part of this essay, the *active obedience* of Christ benefits us because of the *vicarious* (or *substitutionary*) nature of His entire work of redemption. Just as His suffering and death (His *passive obedience*) was carried out in our behalf *as our Substitute* (Isaiah 53:4–5), so also His perfect fulfilling of the Law was done *as our Substitute* (Romans 5:18–19). Just as for the sake of Christ's *vicarious passive obedience* God graciously declares *us* to be free from the punishment of our sins (since His Son suffered it in our place), so also for the sake of Christ's *vicarious active obedience* God graciously declares *us* not only to be *free from* all of our sinful imperfections but to be truly *righteous*—counted as if *we* had actually kept the Law of the Lord perfectly in all of our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds (since this is what

Christ did in our place). How fitting, then, that in the Old Testament the pre-incarnate Christ is given the “name” of “*the Lord* [Heb. *Jehovah*] *our righteousness*” (Jeremiah 23:6). The blessed result of Christ’s *active obedience* includes both the fact that all of our transgressions have been removed from our charge —having been placed on Christ (Isaiah 53:6)— and the fact that the righteousness of Christ’s perfect life has been imputed to us. This work of God’s grace —our sinfulness being charged to the righteous Christ, and His righteousness being credited to us sinners— is described by the Apostle Paul as follows: “*He* [God the Father] *hath made Him* [Christ] *to be sin for us, who* [Christ] *knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (II Corinthians 5:21).

The Scriptures use the term “*justification*” to describe the way that the Lord regards and declares sinners to be righteous for Jesus’ sake —forgiving them all their sins. Justification is a “*forensic*” imputation of righteous (as a judge in a court of law would pronounce a verdict of innocence upon a guilty person); justification is *not* what is sometimes described as a “*medical*” infusion of righteousness (which would enable the ungodly to *earn* righteousness by righteousness of living). Even though we have been completely justified by faith, we still commit sins in our lives; but the glorious result of Christ’s work of redemption is that we sinful human beings are declared by the divine Judge to be righteous and holy (saints) for the Savior’s sake (Colossians 1:22). Now while it is certainly right and proper to say that Christ purchased our justification through His suffering and death —His *passive obedience* (Isaiah 53:4–5; Romans 5:10; Hebrews 10:14,18; I John 1:7)— we must not minimize the importance of His *active obedience* in securing our justification. Romans 5:18–19 refers specifically to Jesus’ perfect obedience to God’s Law as bringing about justification (forgiveness, imputed righteousness) for all mankind. “*By the offence of one* [namely, Adam’s violation of God’s prohibition] *judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One* [Christ’s sinlessness] *the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.*” This passage clearly connects, as cause and effect, the active obedience of Christ with the forgiveness of all mankind (*objective justification*).

It is for the sake of Jesus’ perfect fulfilling of God’s Law as our Substitute that we are declared righteous —regarded by the Lord as if *we* have perfectly kept His Law. And while this gracious non-imputation of guilt and imputation of righteousness is for all sinners in the whole world (II Corinthians 5:19), its full benefit is enjoyed only by those who *receive* the forgiveness of sins *by faith* in the Gospel promises. This, of course, was true also in the Old Testament, when the believers’ faith was directed ahead to the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. St. Paul emphasizes this very thing in chapters three and four of his epistle to the Romans, where we find such verses as: “*But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. ...Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ...If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ...To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*” (3:21–22, 24; 4:2–3, 5–8). What Paul here calls “*the righteousness of God*” is the righteousness that God imputes to us sinful creatures; it is the righteousness that was earned for us by Christ’s substitutionary life of righteousness in satisfaction of God’s

legislative justice in our behalf.

Though we have so often, to our great shame, transgressed the holy Law of the Lord, yet the Gospel assures us that all of our sins and iniquities have been forgiven for Jesus' sake, who kept the Law perfectly for us. So then, if you are troubled in your mind because you know that you have broken the *First Commandment* countless times by not always putting the Lord first in your heart and life, and you truly repent of that sin of idolatry, take comfort in the knowledge that Christ kept that Commandment perfectly in your stead and, also in your stead, suffered the penalty for your violations. If your conscience bothers you because you know that you have broken the *Second Commandment* time and time again by not always praying, praising, and giving thanks to the Lord as you should, and in true contrition your broken heart cries out for God's mercy, then take comfort knowing that Christ did all these things as your Substitute and suffered the punishment that you deserve according to God's justice. If you are grieved because you know that you have broken the *Third Commandment* by not always listening attentively with the greatest respect when the Word of God is preached and taught to you, or because you have been negligent in reading and studying the Scriptures, and you are truly penitent in your heart, then be comforted by the fact that your Lord Jesus kept the Third Commandment perfectly for you and fully atoned for your transgressions. If you truly repent for having violated the *Fourth Commandment* by not always honoring and gladly serving and obeying your parents and other superiors in love, then be of good cheer because Jesus did this perfectly on your behalf and propitiated the anger of God which you deserve. If you are terrified at the thought of God punishing you for your sins against the *Fifth Commandment* and truly repent of not always having genuine love for those who have hurt you and in not doing all that you can to help your neighbor, even your enemy, in every bodily need, then let the fact that Christ vicariously maintained perfect love for all people, even His most bitter enemies, and loved both you and them unto death, even the death of the cross, remove all fear from your heart. If you are deeply ashamed because you have not always kept your heart pure from sinful sexual desires and have not always avoided opportunities for unchasteness in violation of the *Sixth Commandment*, and if you are truly penitent for doing such great wickedness and sinning against God, then let your conscience be relieved in the knowledge that Jesus led a chaste and decent life in all of His thoughts, desires, words, and deeds in your place and bore in His own sinless soul and body the wages of your sins. If you sincerely repent of having sinned against the *Seventh Commandment* by succumbing to envy and not always rejoicing when you have seen your neighbor prosper, then be gladdened by the fact that Jesus, as your Substitute, kept the Seventh Commandment perfectly and gave His life a ransom for your sins. If you are humbly penitent for not always having put the best construction on your neighbor's actions, nor defended your neighbor against slanderous gossip, then be relieved by the fact that Christ's perfect fulfilling of the *Eighth Commandment* earned you perfect righteousness before God and that His perfect suffering and death canceled all your guilt in this area. If you are sorrowfully penitent for your countless trespasses against God's *Ninth* and *Tenth Commandments*, then let the Gospel comfort you, knowing that your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ kept His heart completely pure from all covetousness, that His perfect holiness is imputed to you, and that His suffering and death has cleared your guilt before your just and holy God.

## **Part V: The Active Obedience of Christ Applied in Our Lives of Sanctification**

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone  
and rests in Him unceasing;  
and by its fruits true faith is known,  
with love and hope increasing.

Yet faith alone doth justify;  
works serve thy neighbor and supply  
the proof that faith is living.

(T.L.H. 377, v. 9)

It would, however, be a terrible abuse of God's grace in Christ Jesus to take the blessed comfort offered in the Gospel as a license to sin—as if Christ's perfect fulfilling of the Law makes it possible for us to transgress His Commandments willfully and with impunity. A true Christian, according to his new man of faith, does not want to break any of God's Commandments. The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that even though he does not keep the Law of God perfectly in his life (on account of the constant influence of his sinful flesh), it is still his on-going desire as a Christian to serve the Lord perfectly according to His Commandments. He declares: "*What I would [that is, 'what I want to do'], that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ...For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. ...For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members*" (Romans 7:15, 18–19, 22–23). If a person claims to be a Christian, but also admits that he *does not want* to follow what he knows to be a command of the Lord, then that individual is certainly *not* a Christian. The Apostle John writes in his first epistle: "*He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His Commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*" (2:4). A true believing child of God is moved by God's love for him in Christ Jesus to love the Lord in return, and to show this love by cheerfully following His Commandments. Again, in John's first epistle we read: "*We love Him because He first loved us. ...For this is the love of God, that we keep His Commandments; and His Commandments are not grievous*" (4:19, 5:3).

The Bible uses the term "*sanctification*" (in its narrower sense) to describe the Christian's life of good works according to God's Commandments (I Thessalonians 4:1–3). In true Christians, God continuously works the sincere desire to follow His Law and please Him in all of their thoughts, words, and actions out of loving gratitude for all that Christ has done to save them from their sins (Philippians 2:13). The *active obedience* of Christ, which indispensably belongs to His redemptive work) is, therefore, a motivating factor that urges and impels the Christian daily to "*put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*" and to "*put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:22, 24). But how are we to know whether a particular work is good and well-pleasing before God (proceeding from our new man), or if it is an abominable sin in His sight (proceeding from our sinful flesh)? Since we are not able to annihilate the old man or nullify its power to deceive and corrupt our heart, we must not look to our own thoughts and feelings in order to determine what is morally right or wrong. The Prophet Jeremiah writes: "*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?*" (17:9; see also Romans 8:7). We should be very thankful, therefore, that the Lord has recorded His Law for us on the pages of Holy Scripture; and in this Law, serving as a *rule* for our lives, we are clearly guided and taught precisely what is truly good and what is truly evil.

Not only does Holy Scripture instruct us in God's Law through the clear declarations of what He forbids and what He requires of us, but it also supplements this instruction with numerous historical accounts that show either sinful behavior as examples that should not be followed, or

the Godly behavior of those whose examples we should strive to follow in our own lives. In our Catechism's thorough treatment of the Ten Commandments, in addition to the numbered proof passages, we are also given many "Bible Narratives," which should not be overlooked. Concerning various *negative* examples taken from the behavior of the Children of Israel in the wilderness, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "*With many of them [the Israelites] God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition*" (I Corinthians 10:5–11).

A collection of *positive* examples worth emulating, taken from the lives of various Old Testament believers, can be found in Hebrews chapter 11. But the one Man who left us the perfect example of Godliness is Jesus Christ Himself. Accordingly, we see that the *active obedience* of Christ, His perfect keeping of the Law, in addition to being a Gospel motivation for us to conform our lives in love to His Commandments, also provides us with a perfect *model* after which we should pattern *our* obedience. In this regard, the life of Jesus is in a special category all by itself. When considering the Biblical accounts of the lives of the saints, we must not forget that they, like all people since the fall of Adam, were sinners. For this reason, we must not think that just because it is recorded in the Scriptures that one of the heroes of the faith did a certain thing, that it must have been a good and righteous thing that he or she did, simply based on the fact that he was such a strong believer. On the contrary, if a certain thought, word, or deed can be shown to be a clear violation of God's Law, then it is, in fact, a sin, no matter which of the saints did it, because "*sin is the transgression of the Law*" (I John 3:4). Conversely, if the Scriptures record that God was well-pleased by what the person did, then *that* definitely was not a sin. But when considering the example that *Christ* left us, we do not need to evaluate His words and actions in the light of God's Law in order to determine whether they were morally good or not (even though such a comparison would always validate His righteousness), because we know *a priori* (without the need of such examination), based on the sure testimony of God's Word, that everything Jesus did was completely holy and sinless.

Consider this example: God tells us in His Law that we are to obey the government (Romans 13:1–5); but He also makes it clear that there are times when we should *not* obey the government, namely, when it requires us to do that which is sinful or forbids us to do that which is good (Acts 5:29). Now in His instruction concerning frivolous oaths, Jesus, our God and Lord, makes the statement: "*Swear not at all*" (Matthew 5:34). This is a command of God's Law. So when considering how the judicial branch of the government requires witnesses to *swear* to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, how do we know if this is a time to obey the government, or a time to disobey the government? Would it be frivolous swearing and therefore a sin to allow the government to place us under oath? No, it would not be a sin; and we can demonstrate this by the very fact that *Jesus allowed the Jewish court of the Sanhedrin to place Him under oath* (Matthew 26:63–64). Since the Bible clearly states that Jesus never sinned, it must be accepted that His testimony under oath at the behest of the high-priest was not a sinful oath. Therefore, it is not a sin for *us* to take an oath in court; but it would be a sin if we refused to comply with the government's demands that we swear to tell the truth (I Peter 2:13–14).

From the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which record many historical details relating to Jesus' active obedience, we can find a great deal of examples of His flawless adherence to the Law that should also be followed by us in our lives out of love for Him. Jesus' humble submission to His parents (Luke 2:51) is a model for all Christian children to remember and emulate. His example of fervent prayer coupled with His desire for the will of His heavenly Father to be done in all things (Matthew 26:39, 42) shows us how we also should bring our petitions before the Lord in the hour of need. The way that Jesus prayed on behalf of those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34)—desiring that they would be brought to repentance and be saved from their sins—reminds us not to neglect praying for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Throughout His public ministry, Christ, who, because He is God, was truly worthy of being humbly served by sinful mankind, had nevertheless so humbled Himself that He chose instead to serve *us* both in His active and passive obedience; and He taught His disciples to follow this example that He gave them, saying: *“Whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister [servant], and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto [served], but to minister [serve], and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:43–45). Jesus furthermore stressed the fact that He wants us to learn from and follow His consistent example of humble and loving service, when He told the disciples after He had washed their feet: *“Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. **For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.** ...A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; **as I have loved you, that ye also love one another”*** (John 13:13–15, 34). Not that the divine command to love our neighbor as ourselves was newly introduced by Christ (since it can be found also in Leviticus 19:18); but the “newness” of this commandment was that we should follow the perfect example of our Savior in doing so.

Accordingly, the apostles were able to use the *active obedience* of Christ as a tool in teaching the people about true sanctification. In addition to setting forth the specific commands and prohibitions of the Lord, they could also direct their readers to remember the absolutely perfect example left by Christ. Concerning patience in suffering injustice without retaliation, Peter writes: *“Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously”*** (I Peter 2:21–23). Concerning our extension of forgiveness to those who have sinned against us, St. Paul writes to the Colossians: *“Forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; **even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye”*** (3:13; some examples: Mark 2:5; Luke 7:48). Concerning true humility and the service of our neighbor in preference to the service of our own wants, Paul writes to the Philippians: *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. **Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”*** (2:3–8). Concerning the unselfish love that husbands are to show to their wives, St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: *“Husbands, love your wives, **even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it”***(5:25). And concerning the self-sacrificing love that God requires *all of us* to have toward our fellow human beings, we read: *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, **as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor”***



(Ephesians 5:1–2).

A further point to consider in applying the *active obedience* of Christ to our lives of sanctification is the fact that without Christ's substitutionary keeping of God's Law none of our works could possibly be pleasing to the Lord. Without the righteousness of Christ having been imputed to us, all of our own best works are nothing but "*filthy rags*" in His holy sight (Isaiah 64:6). But the Bible tells us that in and through the saving work of Jesus Christ, God declares us to be free from every taint of sin, and accepts our works of loving obedience as "*righteousness*" (Philippians 1:11). This is the only way that our imperfect following of His Commandments can be acceptable before the Lord, since by faith in Christ our imperfections are completely covered under the robe of His righteousness. Describing us Christians as being living stones in the spiritual temple of the Lord, St. Peter tells us in his first epistle: "*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*" (I Peter 2:5). So then with reference to our life of good works, the *active obedience* of Christ supplies us with the *motivation* and *power* to do good, the perfect *example* of what is morally good, as well as the *purifying righteousness* by which our works are accepted by God as being truly good (Ephesians 2:10) through the substitutionary satisfaction of His legislative justice.

If we keep these things in mind, we will certainly not minimize the importance of Christ's vicarious *active obedience* as this relates to our eternal salvation and to our Christian life here on earth. Without His perfect righteousness having been imputed to us as our very own, we would still be obligated to keep the Law of God perfectly in all of our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds in order to be saved (which obligation we sinful creatures would never be able to fulfill). So may God the Holy Ghost stir our heart and soul through the study of this glorious doctrine of His grace, causing us through it to grow all the more appreciative of Christ's work of fulfilling the divine Law flawlessly in our stead, whereby we are able to stand before the Lord clothed in His perfect righteousness, and receive His boundless grace, mercy, and peace here in time and hereafter in eternity.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

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